

Judge rules Western State can force Tacoma teen to take medicines

Judge sides with doctors who say treatment can restore teen to competency so he can be tried on 12 felony charges

By ADAM LYNN

Staff writer, The News Tribune

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A Pierce County judge on Wednesday authorized doctors at Western State Hospital to forcibly administer anti-psychotic medications to a Tacoma teenager accused of a series of sex crimes, including the attempted rape of a day care worker last spring.

Andrake Morris, 19, quit taking medications to control his auditory hallucinations in November. Nurses at the state psychiatric hospital in Lakewood first noted Morris' refusal Nov. 21, but it is unclear whether he stopped taking the medicines before that.

Dr. Nitin Karnik, a psychiatrist at Western State, testified during a hearing Wednesday in Superior Court that Morris suffers from a psychotic disorder that impairs his ability to understand the charges against him and to aid his attorney in his defense.

Morris was charged last year with 12 felonies, including first-degree robbery, attempted first-degree rape, indecent liberties and attempted second-degree kidnapping.

Prosecutors say he attacked five women over the course of a year, including the beating and attempted sexual assault of a day care worker in March. Investigators say he went to the Tender Hearts day care before it opened, talked his way inside and then attacked the woman working there.

Morris has pleaded not guilty and is being held in jail in lieu of \$2 million bail.

A judge found Morris incompetent to stand trial last year and ordered him to Western State for treatment. The process did not begin until Nov. 1 because of a logistical mix-up, and Morris further complicated matters by refusing to take his medicine.

Deputy prosecutor Scott Peters filed a motion late last year asking Judge Edmund Murphy to authorize doctors at Western State to inject Morris with drugs against his will if he would not voluntarily take them.

Karnik testified Wednesday that Morris has reported hearing voices "that tell him to do things and tell him not to do certain other things."

The defendant also is prone to aggressive behavior, including attacking people, as a result of his condition, Karnik said via phone from his office.

The doctor said medicating Morris was the best way to try to restore his competence to stand trial and to help treat his symptoms.

“It is my opinion that medication would help Mr. Morris think more clearly, be less assaultive and restore him to competency,” Karnik said.

Peters argued that’s what should happen.

“Without that, he remains incompetent, and the likelihood of him being restored is zero,” the deputy prosecutor said.

Defense attorney Michael Schwartz argued there was no guarantee that forcibly treating his client would restore his competency to stand trial. There is evidence Morris also has a mental disability bordering on retardation that could prevent him from ever standing trial, Schwartz said.

“That medication is not going to cure any cognitive impairment,” the defense attorney argued.

Murphy sided with Peters. Doctors at Western State wouldn’t be able properly to evaluate Morris’ cognitive ability until they get his psychosis under control, the judge said.

He did order that Morris be offered the chance to voluntarily take his prescribed medications before doctors forcibly inject him.

Morris will be transferred from the Pierce County Jail to Western State as soon as possible for a 90-day stay to undergo treatment.

Adam Lynn: 253-597-8644
adam.lynn@thenewstribune.com
[@TNTadam](#)

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